



***United States Attorney  
Southern District of New York***

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**MEXICO-BASED COLOMBIAN TRAFFICKER  
SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON BY U.S. COURT**

JAMES B. COMEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today that HERBERT ALBERTO CRUZ RUIZ, a Colombian national known as "GINO BRUNETTI," was sentenced to two life terms in prison by United States District Judge John F. Keenan in Manhattan federal court today. BRUNETTI's sentence follows his May 2002 plea of guilty to charges related to his role between 1996 and 2001 as a broker of huge shipments of cocaine between two of the largest drug cartels in the world: the Cali-Colombia based Norte Valle Cartel and the Tijuana-Mexico based Arellano-Felix Organization ("AFO").

According to court records -- including records of prior convictions -- BRUNETTI has been involved in the trafficking of increasing quantities of cocaine and other drugs from Colombia to the United States for the last twenty years. Those records indicate that BRUNETTI was born in Cali, Colombia, in or about 1961, and that he began dealing smaller quantities of cocaine in the early 1980's after he moved from Colombia to Los Angeles,

California. According to court records, by the mid 1980's that drug-dealing had grown to involve the sale of kilogram quantities of cocaine in Los Angeles and Miami and led to two felony convictions in the United States: the first in 1986 in California State Court, the second in 1988 in the United States District Court for the Central District of California.

Court records indicate that BRUNETTI's 1988 conviction led to a 10 year prison sentence, and that BRUNETTI served approximately five years of that sentence at a federal corrections facility near Phoenix, Arizona. According to documents filed in federal court, while in prison BRUNETTI befriended members of the "Mexican Mafia" (also known as "El EME"), a gang whose members were involved in drug trafficking and murder on behalf of the AFO inside and outside of prisons in the United States and Mexico.

Court records show that after his early release in 1993, BRUNETTI was deported back to Colombia, and that approximately two years later, in 1995, BRUNETTI re-established contact with members of "El EME" he had met while incarcerated in Arizona, and who were residing in Tijuana, Mexico. According to court records, as a result of these contacts, BRUNETTI -- operating primarily out of Rosarito, Mexico -- brokered agreements between members of Colombia's notorious Norte Valle cartel and AFO members with access to the smuggling routes necessary to smuggle loads of cocaine into the United States. According to court

documents, BRUNETTI's crimes, which took place between mid-1996 and March of 2001, involved thousands of kilograms of cocaine.

According to court documents, BRUNETTI was arrested in August 2001, when BRUNETTI, having learned of his Indictment in New York in March 2001, used a false Mexican passport to flee to Europe and then to South America. According to court records, BRUNETTI was arrested approximately four months later at the Cancun International Airport in Mexico.

Mr. COMEY praised the work of the DEA and the New York Drug Enforcement Task Force for its work in this investigation. The task force is comprised of special agents of the DEA, narcotics investigators of the New York State Police, and narcotics detectives of the New York City Police Department.

That investigation, which led to the seizure of more than \$1 million worth of cocaine in Midtown Manhattan in March 2001, has led to the conviction of 13 other individuals and sentences ranging from five to 30 years in prison.

Assistant United States Attorneys ROBERTO FINZI and JOSHUA A. LEVINE are in charge of the prosecution.

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